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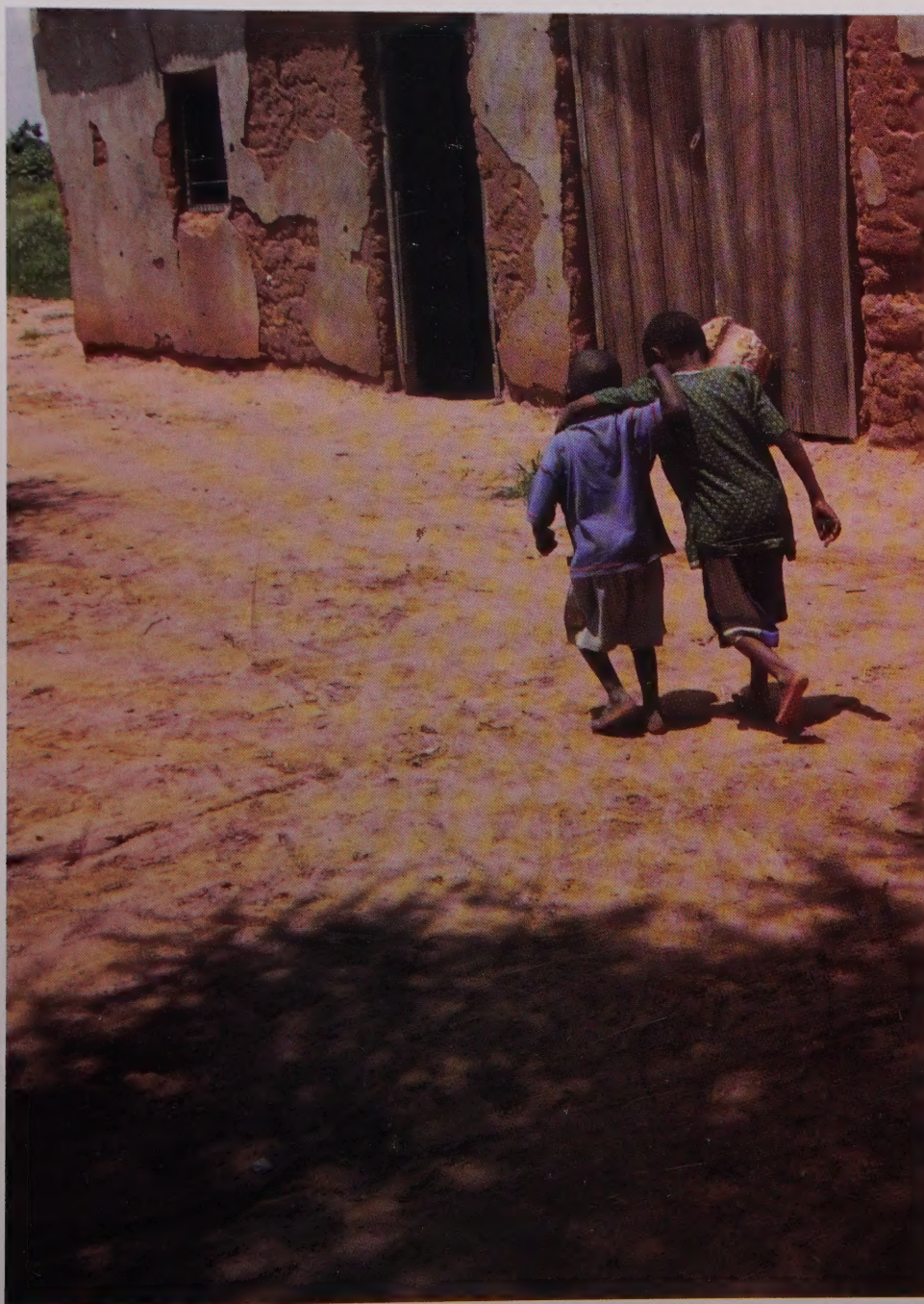
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# Lutheran Woman

May 2008

TODAY



Blessed to See  
Sainly Mothers

A Life Transformed  
The Gift of Years







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## GOOD COMPANY

VOLUME 21 NUMBER 4 MAY 2008

The Beatitudes don't bless us so we look good—they bless us so we do good. When we do good, we're in fine company as we bear the face of Christ to our neighbor and each other.

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## VOICES

### Good Company

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

## In this final session of

our Bible study, Martha Stortz assures us that, "In God's kingdom, the goodness of the Lord reigns fully, completely, and every tear will be wiped away. The goodness of the Lord will rule! And part of the way that goodness rules is through us, as those whom the Beatitude blesses become a blessing to others."

David Miller writes in "Blessed to See" that "God's rule is the supreme blessing of life.... It is the end to which the Spirit draws us that we may know and rest in the goodness of God." He says that awareness of God's loving rule "transforms our vision that we witness and know blessedness where normal sight sees only suffering."

These are hard days for those who work for God's kingdom, those who long to know that blessedness. War, poverty, hunger, and suffering are on the march and we see scant evidence of God's rule. But still, we do not lose heart because we find ourselves in the good company of those—both past and present, near and far—who are blessed to be a blessing to others.

This month, we consider two women whose faithfulness had a long-lasting effect on the church. In "Saintly Mothers," Judy Chiarelli describes Helena, the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, and Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. Chiarelli writes, "There are many examples throughout history of mothers who worked closely with their children to do God's work. When we look at the lives of such saintly

mothers we notice that they all share the virtue of patience."

New mother Kathryn Sime asks, "How would our world be different if we realized that all God's children are as precious as those in our own lives?" In "All God's Children," she describes "how our gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal provide a mothering embrace to children living in poverty around the world."

The mission of Women of the ELCA is to "mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ." In this issue we meet Michele Zeller, a woman who left her comfortable home in Iowa to volunteer on a hospital ship in Liberia. She writes, "I see the world differently now. God has given me the gifts of mercy, encouragement, and serving. I didn't have these before, and I didn't do anything to earn them. They appeared by grace along the journey."

Finally, in this issue, we run an excerpt from a new book on aging by Joan Chittister. In "The Gift of Years," Sister Joan writes about "getting accustomed to being older." She tells us that, "I begin to see the world differently, too. It is to be treasured, to be explored, to be enjoyed. . . . Other people begin to look different to me, too. They are as transformed as I am."

The feast of Pentecost is this month (May 11). May you be reminded of the good company and loving reign of God all around you, both now and in the long green season ahead. 🌿

**Kate Sprutta Elliott** is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You can write to her at [LWT@elca.org](mailto:LWT@elca.org).





GIVE US THIS DAY

## Whispering Hope

by Marj Leegard

### One year just before

Christmas, our daughter Laurie's first-grade friends decided that it was time to write to Santa Claus. We had been waiting for that letter since we hadn't a notion of Laurie's hopes for Christmas. She took her paper and pencil to bed with her. I thought we would get a chance to read the letter later, but she sealed it in an envelope. When her dad came in from the barn, Laurie had a question for him. Jerome washed his hands and then went in and sat beside her bed. She said, "I need to know one thing: Do we have room in the barn for a pony?"

The thought was news to us but apparently not to her. She already had the pony named and its gender and color and personality figured out. The pony would be called Misty, and she would be sweet and lovable, white with brown spots. Laurie got the name right, but he was a colt and his disposition was based on independence. She loved him anyway.

For young Laurie, Santa Claus was the person to speak to about her hope. So long as we were able, we could keep the Christmas fable going. She would grow into the real hope of Christmas as she got older. For her, the important thing was to make sure there was room in the barn for the realized hope.

We are not so careful about making room for our hopes. We picture our hope as the solution to a problem or an answer to our difficulties. We are apt to be like Laurie and have the name and the brown spots chosen. The old hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less

than Jesus' blood and righteousness." But in my heart I know my hopes are often built on my own plans.

Years ago, Alice and Jeanette used to sing "Whispering Hope" and I wiped away tears every time. I can still hear those voices singing of that gentle hope.

The best place to experience this is in a fishing boat on the lake. Just before dawn, the sky lightens, a breeze blows across the waters, and the fish jump. People say that the fish are catching bugs, but I know that the fish are jumping for joy! The light has come again as it has done before. That is hope.

We can plead for days filled with peace and security, but until there is room in our hearts for the blessed hope of living with God in eternity, our barn isn't ready.

Jesus is preaching the Beatitudes to his followers. They are mingled with a huge crowd seeking healing in the only clinic they have, a hillside by the sea-shore. Jesus jars them with the picture of their ultimate hope realized: My kingdom will be the sad and weeping, the hungry and the cold, the poor and mistreated. Where there is nothing else, there is room for the gift that you bring: hope.

Do not wonder about hope. It is real. We not only have it, we are the carriers. Whispering hope is a powerful voice, but it is gentle. If an earthly father lovingly makes room for a spotted pony's stall, just imagine what our heavenly Father does! 🌸

**Marj Leegard** and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



*Acting Boldly*

# *A Life Transformed*

by Michele Zeller





*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

*(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

## This passage isn't just words on a page to me; it is a picture of my life over the last six years.

Today, I am sitting on my bunk in a cabin I share with five other women, here on a ship named *Africa Mercy*, now docked at Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, and reflecting on how I got here.

I look back to where I was before all this began. In January 2001, I

was living my version of the American dream, without an inkling that my dream was about to be shattered. At 36, I had a great life—I was in a 15-year marriage; I had worked my way up into senior management in a software company, traveling all over the world and making a six-figure income. We lived in a large house on a private golf course—the country-club lifestyle.

And then my husband told me he didn't want to be married anymore. Shock, denial, depression, anger, hatred—those are the emotions I experienced in those early days. But then God showed up in a life-transforming way. I wasn't much of a believer back then and, honestly, I had never thought about whether or not there was a God. But mysteriously, a few weeks before, my husband and I had decided we should start going to church.

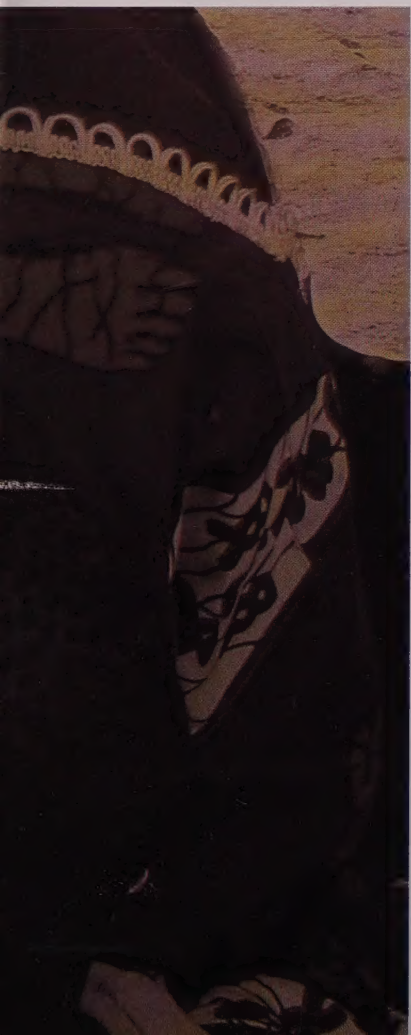
I don't know why we had decided this other than that God put the desire in my heart because God knew what I was about to go through. We started Christian

counseling and I was introduced to Jesus Christ. After two months, I was baptized and the transformation began. I knew immediately that my lifestyle and my priorities were in no way aligned with God's purpose for my life. While the divorce was being finalized, I spent months researching different careers and lifestyles including social work, teaching, the Peace Corps, and even tasting ice cream for a living.

### A life-changing article

And then one day in the doctor's office, I picked up a magazine and read an article about Mercy Ships, the non-governmental hospital ships that bring free medical care to people living in some of the poorest countries in the world. As soon as I read it, I knew that is what God wanted me to do, to become a nurse and serve with Mercy Ships. It was confirmed the next day when my pastor/counselor asked me if I had ever thought of being a nurse.

The journey was a long one. I experienced depression and insomnia



Photos courtesy: Michele Zeller



as I dealt with the after-effects of the divorce. I spent three years in nursing school and then had to get two years of work experience before I could join Mercy Ships. I also had to downsize my lifestyle since those who serve on Mercy Ships are volunteers who receive no salary but pay for their own room and board and airfare.

Thanks to the emotional, spiritual, and financial support of my family, friends, and the staff at Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, Iowa, I arrived in Liberia in June 2007, where I now work for Mercy Ships as a palliative care or hospice nurse.

Liberia, one of the poorest countries in the world, is home to about 3.2 million people. Its 14-year civil war ended in 2003. Most Liberians have no electricity or access to sewage. Unemployment is about 85 percent. The average annual income per person is \$130. Of every 1,000 children, 235 die before their fifth birthday; that's among the five highest mortality rates in the world. The average life expectancy is 42 years.

Since 1978, Mercy Ships ([www.mercyships.org](http://www.mercyships.org)) have followed the example of Jesus Christ, bringing hope and healing to the poor.

Life-changing surgeries are performed on board the ships at no cost to the recipients. More than 400 volunteers from more than 40 countries and from several Christian

denominations have come together on the *Africa Mercy* to serve the people of Liberia.

Working as a palliative care nurse in a country with no health care is heartbreaking and frustrating. Cancer in a country like Liberia has a 100 percent death rate. There is no chemotherapy or radiation treatment. There are no oncologists or surgeons. There is no money for medication to help control the pain.

The upside to this job is that I get to show the love of Christ to people in need every single day. My nursing partner and I travel to our patients' homes weekly to provide nursing care, pain medicine, and emotional and spiritual support. I get to tell them how much God loves them, and we talk about eternity with Jesus.

#### Each one of them has a name

Most of my patients are children with cancer, and all live in abject poverty. The stories you read of children dying in Africa are true, and each one of them has a name and a family and a history.

There's Nush who died one day after his eighth birthday. I had bought him a football, and we were on the way to give it to him when we got the call that he had died unexpectedly. Mercy Ships had provided his tuition the week before his death and he was so excited to finally start school. He was a beau-

tiful, animated little boy with huge eyes and big dimples.

There's 15-year-old George who had an aggressive cancer that took him away in less than a month. He died alone in the hospital.

There's 19-year-old Gbah who was taken to the hospital in critical condition. He needed a blood transfusion but the hospital had no blood, so his father took him by taxi to another hospital to see if it had blood. But the lab was closed. He died at home the next day.

There's 11-year-old Candy who is still alive even though she has battled cancer for almost two years. She is from Ivory Coast but came to Monrovia seeking treatment. Though we could offer no treatment for her cancer, she and her father remained here so that we could take care of her extremely painful wounds. Candy and her father have lived apart from her mother and five siblings since March 2006.

There's five-year-old Survivor and 12-year-old Joseph and 11-year-old Junior and two-year-old Armstrong and six-month-old Joanna and three-year-old Korto and Yatta and Winifred and Liaa and Rose. The list goes on and on.

If someone had told me six years ago that I would be living on a ship and working as a hospice nurse in Africa caring for dying children, I would have said they were crazy. Nothing in me wanted to serve





*Michele prays with Grace Tenty and sons Ivan (left) and Levi (right), who has Burkitt's lymphoma.*

others, let alone serve in such heart-breaking, unjust conditions.

That is where the transformation from 2 Corinthians comes in. There isn't an ounce of my old life or self left. I see the world differently now. God has given me the gifts of mercy, encouragement, and serving. I didn't have these before, and I didn't do anything to earn them. They just appeared by grace along the journey.

God has used my divorce for good. It has given me the freedom

to serve in a place I couldn't have served if I were still married. I live very simply now. I don't have stuff except for a few items of clothes and my laptop. I don't have a car here or a cell phone or a television. I love being away from all the busyness of my old life.

My new life philosophy is wrapped up in Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

While not everyone is called to leave their family and friends to serve the desperately poor on the other side of the world, we are all called to justice, love, kindness, and walking humbly with God. God will show us the way. 🌿

**Michele Zeller** is a volunteer hospice nurse on a Mercy Ship docked at Monrovia, Liberia. She is a member of Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, Iowa. You can read more about her work and her life on the *Africa Mercy* at [www.mzellerafrica.blogspot.com](http://www.mzellerafrica.blogspot.com).





## CALENDAR NOTES

# May

*compiled by Audrey Novak Riley  
from sources including Evangelical  
Lutheran Worship (ELW), Sundays  
and Seasons, and Lutheran Book  
of Worship (LBW), published by  
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers  
([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))*

This month brings us to the end of the joyful season of Easter. Christ ascends to heaven on Ascension Thursday, and the Holy Spirit descends in power on Pentecost Sunday. With that theophany, the Triune God is revealed, and Holy Trinity Sunday is our celebration. In May we also commemorate and celebrate many faithful mothers: Mary, mother of our Lord; Helena, who supported her son's work to bring the whole Roman Empire to the faith; Monica, whose persistence brought her own son to the faith; and our own mothers, who raised many of us in the faith. Thanks be to God!

### 1 Ascension of Our Lord

We celebrate several mysteries this month: The ascension is one of them. We mere human beings can't begin to understand what actually happened at the ascension—after all, it's an act of God, and God is God and we are not. Jesus knows we can't understand it, so he tells us clearly what we're supposed to do about it: be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Today's texts are Acts 1:1–11; Psalm 47 or 93; Ephesians 1:15–23; Luke 24:44–53.

### 2 Philip and James, apostles

Philip, one of Jesus' first followers, kept bringing people to see Jesus, starting with his friend Nathanael lounging under the fig tree. James (son of Alphaeus, also called "the Less," meaning the shorter or the younger) is only named in lists. Their commemoration usually falls on May 1, but this year is transferred because of the Ascension. The readings appointed

for the festival of the two apostles are Isaiah 30:18–21; Psalm 44:1–3, 20–26; 2 Corinthians 4:1–6; John 14:8–14.

### 4 Seventh Sunday of Easter

Here in Ascensiontide, the 10 days between Ascension and Pentecost, we gather with the disciples in the upper room, praying and wondering what comes next. In today's Gospel, Jesus' own prayer to the Father tells us his desire for us: that we may be one, just as he is one with the Father. Might that unity be what comes next, in the power of the Spirit? What might that look like in our own daily lives today? The lives of our congregations? The lives of our nation and the world? Today's texts are Acts 1:6–14; Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35; 1 Peter 4:12–14, 5:6–11; John 17:1–11.

### 4 Monica, mother of Augustine

This North African mother recognized her son's brilliance early and did her determined best to steer him in what she thought was the right direction. His emphatic rejection of her plans for a brilliant marriage and high-flying career led her to a more mature and humble love for him. She turned to prayer for his conversion—and see how that turned out! Even now, nearly 16 centuries later, Bishop Augustine of Hippo is recognized as one of Christianity's greatest thinkers and writers. His work greatly influenced Martin Luther. Read more about Monica and Helena, another Christian mother whom we honor this month, beginning on page 18.



We don't even know the name of this medieval English mystic; the name we use for her comes from the church where she lived in a tiny stone cell. She wrote that love is the meaning of religious experience, provided by Christ who is love, for the purpose of love. She wrote about a difficult situation we have all faced: "Sometimes when we have a hard moral choice to make, it seems that no matter what course of action we choose, our motives are less than completely pure. What to do? She wrote: "It is enough to be sure of the deed. Our courteous Lord will deign to redeem the motive." Read more about Julian on *LWT's* Web site: [www.lutheranwomantoday.org/back/07issues/0507article2.html](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org/back/07issues/0507article2.html).

## 10 Vigil of Pentecost

The vigil of Pentecost has been observed since very early times, perhaps the fourth or fifth century. For centuries, it was a preferred occasion for baptism, second only to the Easter Vigil. You might ponder tonight's texts in light of that baptismal tradition: Exodus 19:1-9 or Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 33:12-22 or 130; Romans 8:14-17, 22-27; John 7:37-39.

## 11 Day of Pentecost

Today's text from Acts tells us that there were crowds of people from every nation gathered in Jerusalem

for Pentecost even before the Spirit came down. What was going on? The Jewish feast of weeks, prescribed in Leviticus, falls 50 days after Passover, just as our Pentecost falls 50 days after Easter. The word *Pentecost* is derived from the Greek word for 50. The Jewish Pentecost, or Shavuot, is both a spring agricultural festival and a commemoration of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Luke's description of the Spirit descending in fire suggests God's several fiery appearances in Exodus, doesn't it? The texts appointed for Pentecost are Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39.

## 11 Mother's Day

Thanks be to God for mothers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, mothers-to-be, godmothers, aunts, great-aunts, and big sisters too!

## 14 Matthias, apostle

Matthias, who had followed Jesus since the beginning, was chosen to be an apostle after the ascension. See today's second reading for all that Scripture tells us about him. Isaiah 66:1-2; Psalm 56; Acts 1:15-26; Luke 6:12-16.

## 18 The Holy Trinity

Just how far beyond our understanding is the Holy Trinity? One of our greatest theologians, Augus-

tine of Hippo, told this story: He was in the midst of writing his monumental treatise on the Trinity and took a walk along the seashore to help clear his thoughts. And on the beach he came across a child pouring seawater into a small hole dug in the sand. "What are you doing?" asked the great scholar, and the child explained that he intended to empty all the water in the sea into the hole. "Impossible," said Augustine. "No more impossible," answered the child, "than for you, O Augustine, to explain the mystery on which you are now meditating." Today's texts are Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.

## 21 Helena, mother of Constantine

Restored to royal honor after her son's ascent to the Roman throne, Helena worked tirelessly to help him bring the whole empire to the faith, including leading archaeological digs and church construction projects! Read more about her beginning on page 18.

## 25 Second Sunday after Pentecost

Now we put away the white Easter vestments, the red Pentecost vestments, and the white Trinity vestments, and change the church's clothes to the green of the long season after Pentecost. After the repentance of Lent, the drama of Holy Week, the rejoicing of Easter



and its seven-week season, and the fiery wonders of Pentecost, now we can sit at Jesus' feet and learn from him. Today he makes his point by repetition: Count how many times the phrase "do not worry" shows up in today's Gospel. The readings appointed for today are Isaiah 49:8-16a; Psalm 131; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34.

### 30 Memorial Day

Today we remember all those who

have died in military service during wartime. As citizens, we honor their service and sacrifice, and as people of faith, we look forward to the day when nation will no longer lift up sword against nation. You might read Isaiah 2:2-4 as part of your devotions today.

### 31 Visit of Mary to Elizabeth

This scriptural event has captured the hearts of artists for centuries. Mary's song, the Magnificat, has

been set to music ranging from the simplest plainsong chant to full choral and orchestral treatment. One scholar suggests that it has been set to music more often than any other hymn in the church's vast library. One reason is that Mary's song has been part of Evening Prayer since at least the sixth century. You might read the texts appointed for today as part of your own evening devotions. 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 113; Romans 12:9-16b; Luke 1:39-57.

**WE PUT YOUR INVESTMENT DOLLARS  
TO WORK BUILDING WALLS, ROOFS AND  
CLASSROOMS, SO THE GOOD NEWS  
CAN BE SHARED IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**

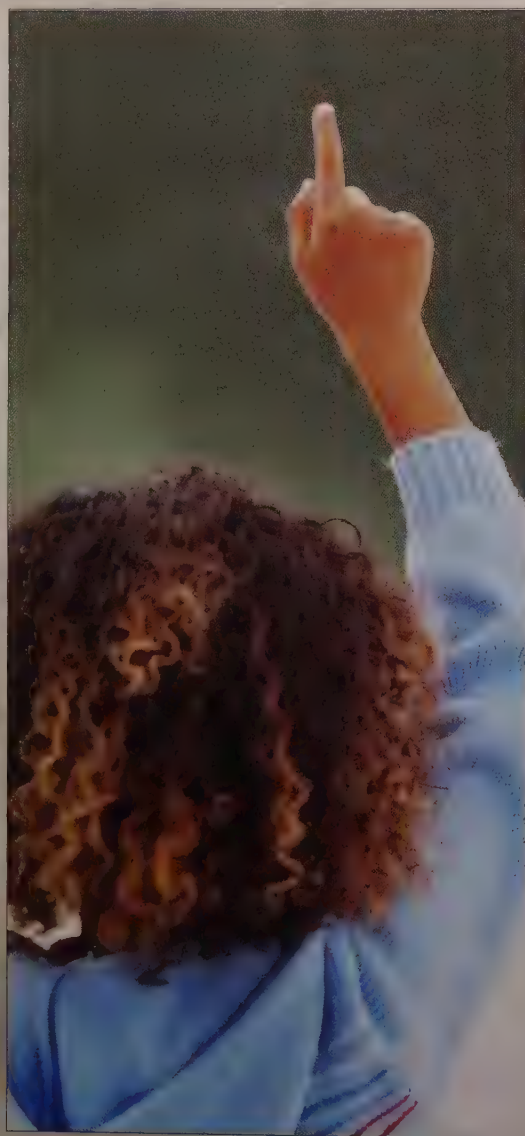
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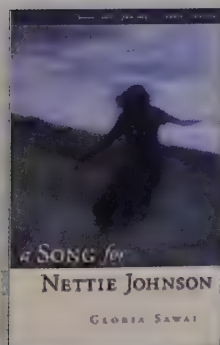
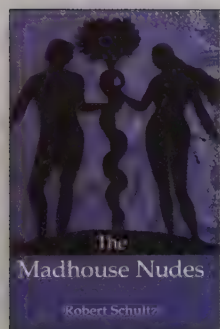
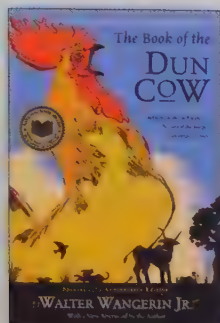




# Engaging Reads

## Lutheran Writers Book Club

by Anne Elliott Ficht



One of the highlights of “Called to Create—A Lutheran Festival of Writing” held last fall at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, was the launch of the Lutheran Writers Book Club. The book club is a resource for readers interested in literature addressing Lutheran culture, history, concerns, and more.

The club’s selection committee announced its first three picks: Walt Wangerin Jr.’s *The Book of the Dun Cow*, Robert Schultz’s *The Madhouse Nudes*, and Gloria Sawai’s *Song for Nettie Johnson*.

The club’s founders envision it as a means for readers and writers to communicate and share thoughts about works of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction produced by writers in the Lutheran tradition. The club’s Web site, [www.lutheranwriters.org](http://www.lutheranwriters.org), lists selected works and offers author interviews, discussion guides, and opportunities for interaction. Churches or groups may schedule appearances by authors or find out about book tours. Readers may weigh in on selected works or offer suggestions for future selections.

“We want the club to be open to everyone, whether it’s a single reader

in Manitoba or a Sunday school class in Chicago,” said Mark Mustian, the book club chair. “We want to challenge, engage, and energize Lutheran readers.”

The club’s first three selections offer a variety of perspectives. Walt Wangerin Jr. is an award-winning writer, teacher, and Lutheran pastor. His novel, *The Book of the Dun Cow*, won the National Book Award in 1980. It tells a story of good and evil in the form of a fable replete with barnyard roosters, dogs, and ants. *The Madhouse Nudes* is a novel about a painter accused of impropriety. It’s a fascinating study of how the world looks at women. *Song for Nettie Johnson* is a series of short stories set mostly in western Canada with characters both troubled by religion and enraptured by it.

“These initial selections offer a great glimpse into three different works of interest to thinking Christians,” said Mustian. “I think readers will be pleased to spend time with them.”

To learn more about the Lutheran Writers Book Club, go to [www.lutheranwriters.org](http://www.lutheranwriters.org). ☸

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.

To learn more about the Lutheran Writers Book Club, go to [www.lutheranwriters.org](http://www.lutheranwriters.org).



# THE GIFT OF YEARS

## *Growing Older Gracefully*



by Joan Chittister

"I am luminous with age," Meridel Le Sueur wrote. Her words give us pause, make us think, call us to the bar of judgment.

The truth is that older people tend to come in two flavors—the sour ones and the serene ones. The sour ones are angry at the world for dismissing them from the rank and file of those who run it and control it and own it and are not old in it. They demand that the rest of the world seek them out, pity them, take their orders, stay captive to their scowls.

The serene ones live with soft smiles on their aging faces, a welcome sign to the world of what it means to grow old gracefully. To have the grace of old age. They require us to go on growing more and more into ourselves as we age. It is of these that Meridel Le Sueur, an American author who lived to be 96, wrote, "I am luminous with age." Luminous. Not painted. Not masked. Luminous!

These serene ones are the women and men who see with wider eyes, hear with tuned ears, speak with a more knowing tongue. These are people with soul.

Fashion and fitness magazines are very clear about what 70 is expected to look like these days. "Seventy" is people on exercise machines and in ballroom dance courses. People in their 70s now are walkers and bowlers, swimmers



and bikers. They fish and golf, they join choral groups, and play cards. These are people who are trim and full of life, mentally sharp and healthy. They exude vigor and excitement. They go to all the right places, see all the right people, do all the right things. And they never tire while they're doing it. They live life with gusto and panache. They defy the years of their lives and go into the sunset singing and dancing.

And that's true, at least to some degree, for many. Never has a generation before us lived so long or lived so well as in the affluent West. Never has life seemed more eternal than now.

At the same time, there is another physical reality going on. Reading the telephone book without glasses has us squinting now—and we buy reading glasses at the pharmacy. We turn the volume up on the television set higher than we ever did before. We find ourselves noticing hair coloring ads now. And though we do walk a bit every day, we don't go as far—and definitely not as fast—as we did years ago.

There have been changes in life that came unbidden but decisively. There is no going back now—and we know it. We don't say it, of course. We hug it to our breasts like a great gray secret. But we do know it. Down deep inside ourselves we know that there is something different going on now. We are being transformed.

But the essential transformation that comes with age is a great deal more than physical well-being, a lot more than being able to play a regular round of golf, an entire way of life different from a Wednesday game of bridge or the weekly round of the clubs.

There is an important part of the aging process that lies in simply getting accustomed to being older. Part of being a vigorous older person demands, first of all, that we learn to accept it for what it is, a new and wonderful—but different—stage of life. We must admit, even in our own minds, to being older in a culture that is so youth-centered that age is something to be hidden, rather than celebrated.

"Me?" we say. "Sixty? Impossible." One can almost hear the tone of shame that goes with it. It burrows into the center of us and an alarm sounds in the heart. How could life be almost over, we worry, when we were just beginning to understand it, to enjoy it, to love it. And with the fear of age, if we succumb to the notion that being older is some kind of obstacle to life, comes the loss of one of life's most profound periods.

The problem is that preparation for aging in our modern world seems to be concentrated almost entirely on buying anti-wrinkle creams and joining a health club—when the truth is that what must be transformed now

is not so much the way we look to other people, as it is the way we look at life. Age is the moment we come to terms with ourselves. We begin to look inside ourselves. We begin to find more strength in the spirit than in the flesh.

The way we view ourselves changes from period to period in life. It is not a steady-state experience, and its most impacting definition comes in middle age. Then, we all get some kind of power, however limited it may be, just by virtue of seniority, if nothing else. We find ourselves in charge somewhere: in charge of the children, in a position of control on the job, in a position of preferment in the family, at a higher social level in the group. We have arrived.

But all of a sudden it seems, as quietly as I arrived, I am now just as quietly dismissed. Power and control cannot be my definition of self anymore. I must now find in myself whatever it is that gives me a personal place in the world around me: I'm fun to be with; I care about other people; I have begun to live for deeper, richer, more important things than I have ever done before. I am caretaker, public watchdog, social advocate, companion now. Then, I begin to see my self differently. I begin to discover that, in many ways, I am far more important now than I have been all my previous life.



I begin to see the world differently, too. It is to be treasured, to be explored, to be enjoyed. An evening on the beach as the sun goes down is worth all the cocktail parties I've ever attended.

Other people begin to look different to me, too. They are as transformed as I am. I no longer see them as roles. They are people now, individuals—not problems, not “connections,” not a measure of my own value. My value now rests entirely in me, in what kind of person I am with others.

I find, too, that the number of absolutes in my life is precipitously reduced. I'm a lot less dogmatic now about the nature of God. I'm not as sure as I once was about what is gravely damning and what is not. Most important of all, I am happy to put that decision in the hands of the God whose nature seems far more compassionate now—as I have gotten more compassionate myself.

Finally, I now see life newly, too. Once I thought of it as a kind of major league competition for money and status and things. Now I see it as something to value for itself. I begin to realize that it is not about having much—it is about having enough.

I begin to understand that the tragedy of life is that so many have so little, that even just having enough to live on is beyond them. I begin to understand that there's

something wrong with that. I have had more than enough help in life. And what about these others? What is my responsibility to them now?

It is the moment of final and full transformation. I have become the fullness of myself, but only after I was able to put down the cosmetics of the self, like the titles, the privileges, the symbols, and the signs of being something more than I was—and at the same time less than I was.

**A burden of these years is the possibility that I might stay more buried in my losses than aware of my gains.**

**A blessing of these years is the transformation of the self to be, at long last, the self I have been becoming all my life, an oasis of serenity in a world gone sour on age, the very acme of life. 🌸**

Joan Chittister, O.S.B., is an award-winning author of more than 35 books. She writes and lectures on issues of peace and justice, human rights, women, and spirituality. She is the executive director of Benetvision: A Resource and Research Center for Contemporary Spirituality. Sister Joan will speak at the Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City, Utah, in July. To learn more about the Gathering, go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).

This excerpt is adapted from Sister Joan's newest book, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully* (BlueBridge). In the book, she writes about how we should celebrate aging. Sister Joan looks at the many facets of aging, from its challenges to its struggles. She asks us to cherish aging as a natural part of life that is active, productive, and deeply rewarding. The book reflects on key issues like the temptation toward isolation, the need to stay involved, the importance of health and well-being, what happens when old relationships end or shift, the fear of tomorrow, and the mystery of forever. The book is available at [www.ipgbook.com](http://www.ipgbook.com).







LET US PRAY

## Gifts from God

by Debra K. Farrington

The story is an obscure one for most of us. In 1 Kings 3 God invited Solomon to ask for whatever he might need to be a good king. Solomon could have asked for wealth or power—the kinds of things a king might find helpful. But instead he asked for what translates literally as a “hearing heart,” a heart filled with God’s wisdom, and he asked for this not only for his own sake, but specifically so he could govern and care for the people God had entrusted to him. In other words, he asked for gifts that would make him a better servant of the Lord. We should all be so wise.

In my retreats, I sometimes ask people to name one or two of their own gifts. That activity makes most of us uncomfortable. I remember a time when a spiritual director asked me to do the same thing years ago and I came up with a long list of my faults, but couldn’t think of a single gift.

In this culture, and perhaps most particularly as women, we are encouraged to be quiet about our gifts, so as not to brag about them. But knowing what God has given to us to use isn’t bragging, and it is essential to being the best servant we can be.

If naming and claiming your gifts makes you squirm, think of it this way. If God gave you a bunch of wrapped presents, would you leave them wrapped for your whole life, or would you open them to see what God has given you? If you don’t know what gifts God has given you, how will you use them to serve God and God’s people?

So take some time this month to make a list—even a short one—of some of the gifts that God has given you. Name all those activities that you really enjoy, the ones that make you light up and that renew your energy when you engage in them; this is usually a sign that these activities indeed call on your gifts from God. Gifts differ for everyone and can be almost anything. For instance, some have gifts for caring for children, budgeting, managing a business, gardening, writing, listening to others—God’s generosity goes on and on.

Now take your list and think about how you might use those gifts to serve God and God’s people. Think widely here. At a retreat I led, someone told me that she thought her artistic talent was a gift from God, but that her art served no one. I beg to differ! Art can open our eyes to God’s beauty or truth, and it can serve God and God’s people very well indeed.

Once you’ve been able to name and claim some of the gifts God has given you, you may discover that you, too, have been serving God and those around you in ways that you might not have recognized before.

By recognizing your gifts you will also have the opportunity to become an even better servant of the Lord, like Solomon, who cares well for those God has entrusted to us. 🌿

**Debra Farrington** has written eight books of Christian spirituality, including *Hearing with the Heart*, in which you can read more about gifts. See her Web site at [www.debrafarrington.com](http://www.debrafarrington.com).





## SAINTLY MOTHERS

*by Judy Chiarelli*

“She’s a saint!” Have you ever heard people say that about their mothers? Values we Christians embrace are shared values of motherhood: selflessness, love, care, strength, virtue, and commitment. There are many examples throughout history of mothers who worked closely with their children to do God’s work. When we look at the lives of such saintly mothers we notice that they all share the virtue of patience. Patience is a sign of wisdom and experience.



It is a spiritual discipline that accepts the unfolding of God's plan over time. What these women do for the glory of God they do with no guaranteed outcome, sometimes for decades. They believe that serving God throughout their lives and through the lives of their children is the ultimate reward.

### Great saints, great mothers

Two great saintly mothers are honored during the month of May: Helena (250–330), mother of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, and Monica (c. 332–387), mother of Augustine. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* commemorates Monica on May 4, and Helena is remembered on May 21. The sons of these faithful women were great historic figures who shaped the world and theology in ways that are still felt today.

Helena came to faith later in life, but once she embraced Christianity she did so fervently. She identified sites in the Holy Land where crucial events in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus took place and established Christian pilgrimages to sites that are still revered today. Her work was important to Constantine's plan to make Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire.

And Monica's steadfast faith influenced her brilliant but wayward son so deeply that he became one of the most prominent theologians and

spiritual writers in Christian history. His work is still read today.

### Helena, Mother of Constantine the Great

Anyone who has had the privilege of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land might have seen Helena's work firsthand. Her early life is shrouded in legend, but we know that she was either the first wife or consort of Constantius, the co-regent of the Western Roman Empire, and that Constantine was her only son. After 23 years, Constantius left Helena to make a political marriage and she was banned from the imperial court. She did not see her son for nearly 20 years. When Constantius died, Constantine was elevated to his father's throne. He summoned his mother to the imperial court, conferring on her the title of Augusta. He ordered that she have all rights of a sovereign and had a coin minted with her image. Helena converted to Christianity after Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312, where he saw a vision of the cross and vowed to make Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire.

Constantine faced the difficult task of shifting the practices of the people to a new religion, suppressing the old Roman cult of the gods and encouraging the new faith. He enlisted his mother, believed to be about 75 years old then, to help with the transition. Historical

documents show us that Helena embodied Christian virtues that were important in the Roman tradition as well: care for the poor, piety, and charity.

In the year 324, the same year Constantinople was declared a Christian city, Helena departed on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem to find the holy places where Jesus lived, preached, suffered, died, and rose from the dead. Along the way she founded many Christian churches and carried out many public works of charity.

Tradition tells us that in Jerusalem, Helena discovered the cross on which our Lord was crucified. The Temple of Venus there was believed to stand over the site of Jesus' crucifixion. She ordered that the temple be thrown down and the site excavated, leading to the discovery of three wooden crosses. Which one was the right one? Legend has it that each one was touched to a sick woman and one healed her. That one was declared the True Cross.

Helena took that cross back with her to Rome in 327 and kept it at her palace, which was later converted into the Abbey of Santa Croce, that is, the Abbey of the Holy Cross. Constantine ordered the construction of a church over the traditional site of the tomb where Jesus lay, also identified by Helena, not far from where the cross had been found. Several other



churches were soon built adjoining the tomb church, including one on the site said to be that of the crucifixion. All these small churches were later joined into one structure, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the most revered church building in Christendom. Rebuilt many times, it still stands in the Old City of Jerusalem today.

Helena had been abandoned by her husband and separated from her son for 20 years. Nonetheless, her patience and wisdom led her to become an important ally for her powerful son and an ardent follower of Christ.

The Christian world still honors Helena, the patron saint of archaeologists, for her work that helped the early Christian church establish its holy sites and its historical roots in the Holy Land. A lovely chapel dedicated to Helena is located deep underground within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

#### Monica, Mother of St. Augustine

Helena's achievements are notable on a historical scale and intricately tied into Constantine's politics, but Monica's fame comes from her spiritual life, which deeply affected those around her. Her relationship with Christ influenced and formed her son, Augustine, who became one of the most important leaders and thinkers in the history of Christianity. Monica's story of faith is

intertwined with her son's conversion story, with both mother and son ultimately serving as powerful instruments of God. Her faith also clearly affected her only daughter Perpetua, a devout woman who later became the superior of a convent of nuns in North Africa.

What is known of Monica comes almost entirely from her son's book, *Confessions*, in which he discusses his mother and her influence on his life. Monica was born of Christian parents in North Africa and was a devout Christian her entire life. She was married in her youth to a pagan husband and had three children with him. Augustine was the eldest. As a young adult, Augustine was, as he admits, wayward and lazy. He became a Manichean (a religious group), lived an immoral life, and began spouting heresies—and so Monica threw him out of the house.

As the story goes, Monica had a vision that urged her to reconcile with him and she let him come back home. Monica asked her bishop what to do about her son, and the bishop consoled her: "The child of those tears shall never perish." She considered his statement a prophetic sign that Augustine would become a Christian.

Augustine left North Africa for Rome and then Milan. Later he wrote that he was trying to get away from his mother, but Monica

almost obsessively followed him. In Milan Monica met Ambrose, who intervened with Augustine and became Monica's spiritual director. After 17 long years of prayer and pleading to bring her son to Christ, Augustine finally embraced Christianity and was baptized by Ambrose in Milan. Monica was delighted, of course; she viewed the event as her life's achievement. The two decided soon after Augustine's baptism to return to North Africa together, but Monica died in the Italian town of Ostia on the way.

Many feel that the finest pages penned by Augustine in *Confessions* are those that detail the life and death of his mother. He writes that Monica's last words to him were, "Bury my body wherever you will; let not care of it cause you any concern. One thing only I ask you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be."

Monica, the patron saint of mothers in difficult situations with their husbands and children, is an example of faith-filled patience and perseverance. The fruits of her love and commitment to God are still with us through the example of her saintly life and those of her children, in particular her brilliant son, Augustine. 🌸

**Judy Chiarelli** has toured the holy sites that Helena discovered. An alumna of Catholic Theological Union, she lives with her husband, Paul, in Chicago.





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# All God's Children

by Kathryn Sime



*Ugandan school children near a Lutheran World Relief camp in the Katakwi District*





**Park Ridge, Illinois.** My day wasn't going as planned. I had an afternoon meeting and letters to sign. Somewhere on my messy desk were the not-quite-final work plans for my maternity leave. An e-mail was half-written, waiting to be sent. And then my morning visit with the doctor transitioned to a run to the hospital for tests and ended with my doctor's cheerful comment: "Well, looks like your baby needs to come today."

My due date was only 11 days away; this shouldn't have come as a shock. But everyone says first babies come late, and I rarely arrive early for anything. However, my blood pressure was too high, and other tests revealed potential dangers for my baby and me. Without waiting for the stunned look to leave my face, the nurse began administering the drugs to induce labor. And at 4:15 the next morning, Calla Grace burst into our lives, with a hearty scream and big bright eyes.

**Mumeya, Rwanda.** Nearly 30,000 people live in this rural village near the Tanzanian border. Living in the aftermath of a horrific genocide, the people of the community are rebuilding and recovering from devastating crisis.

The Lutheran Church of Rwanda, founded in 1995 by Tanzanians and Rwandan refugees in Tanzania, is helping in this recovery by leading a process to identify com-

munity assets and challenges. The community identified a lack of access to health care as a critical problem.

Residents had to travel 30 kilometers (almost 19 miles) for health care. They walked about half that distance just to reach the paved road where they can get a bus to the hospital. About 12 Mumeya women died during childbirth each year because they couldn't get there. Many people who were ill stayed at home instead of seeking treatment because the hospital was just too far away and too hard to reach.

What the village of Mumeya was lacking in health care facilities, it made up for in determination, strength, and a key natural resource: rocks. Relying on all three gifts, community members began building their own primary health care facility. For 18 days, community members—mostly women—broke rocks. For 11 days, they cleared the land. They spent 400 hours laying the foundation. These people worked tirelessly to do all they could to ensure their children would lead healthier lives. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger Appeal augmented their work.

Makaruba Liberathe knows the tragic consequences of a lack of health care and is eager to work with her neighbors to build this facility: "I lost my child on my way to Kibungo hospital. We need a clinic nearby."

Connection to mothers around the world  
As I rock my little Calla to sleep every night, I feel connected to those mothers who moved boulders to ensure a better future for their children. Looking into Calla's trusting eyes, I want to provide my child with all she needs. I can only imagine the painful struggles of mothers and fathers around the world whose children lack health care, nutritious food, clean water, and hope for the future. I give thanks for the care we received during Calla's birth, and I grieve for the mothers and babies who, lacking adequate medical care, will not survive birth or reach their fullest potential. My prayers for Calla echo the prayers of mothers around the world: that our children will grow in health and wholeness under God's watchful care.

How would our world be different if we realized that all God's children are as precious as those in our own lives? Poverty presents the greatest threat to the most vulnerable in any community. Around the world, children are among the most likely to suffer from hunger, poverty-related disease, and disaster. Over 800 million people in the world are chronically hungry, including 5 million children under age five who will die from malnutrition this year. Nearly 3,000 children die of malaria—a preventable disease of poverty—every day. These statistics on poverty are so



incomprehensibly devastating that they threaten to overwhelm us into complacency.

Fortunately, those statistics are not the last word on children and poverty. The good news is that your gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal provide a mothering embrace to children living in poverty around the world.

#### Improving health and self-esteem

**San Isidro, Mexico.** Concepcion Alba teaches in the mountains of San Isidro at a preschool run by Amextra, an ELCA World Hunger partner serving children in poverty in Mexico. Children enrolled in her preschool class not only learn the basics like colors, letters, and

numbers to prepare them to enter elementary school, they and their families are strengthened through Concepcion's compassionate care. Like all preschoolers, these kids sing songs, complete their daily chores, play games, and learn cooperation and sharing through interaction with other children. Says Concepcion, "I love working with the children, especially in helping them develop strong values. We teach them that they have freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility."

Improving children's nutrition and health is also a major emphasis of the Amextra preschool program. Parents regularly bring their children to the school to be weighed and to receive vitamins and infor-

mation. The kids get a healthy breakfast each morning and play at a colorful station where they make a game out of brushing their teeth each day. Concepcion also works with the parents of her pupils, offering self-esteem workshops for mothers and programs to help reduce domestic violence.

#### An important ingredient: self-sufficiency

**Kakinzi, Uganda.** Milly Musinga lives in Kakinzi. She was already a mother of eight, but when she heard about two children in her community who had lost their parents to AIDS, she wanted to help. While orphanages exist, it's much healthier for children to grow up in families in their home communities. Milly was eager to care for these two children orphaned by AIDS, but she needed more income to keep this large family from falling into poverty and hunger.

ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran World Relief (LWR) work with community agencies to provide hunger relief and development. Through those partners, Milly received a \$120 micro-loan and was able to get training and—the most important ingredient for self-sufficiency—a treadle sewing machine. Milly now sews all the school uniforms for children in the area. She has skills that will help her build her future and that of her children. Over time, she will repay



*Milly Musinga makes a living by sewing for the community.*



that loan, providing funds for other women in her community to build their own businesses. With that small loan, two children who lost their parents to AIDS did not have to lose their community ties.

Advocating for children, families, and neighbors

**Concepción, Chile.** “Before EPES (Popular Education for Health) I was a nobody,” Rosa Manriquez Cifuentes said. “My first husband beat me and didn’t let me leave the house for five years. I attended an EPES workshop and from then on I couldn’t stop.” Rosa, her friend Mercedes Quinta Valenzuela, and other brave women advocate for children, families, and neighbors in their poblaciones (poor communities) in Concepción. The women received training through EPES, an ELCA World Hunger partner in Santiago and Concepción founded by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile. But their boldness in advocacy is all their own.

Mercedes, Rosa, and other health promoters lead workshops on topics including self-esteem, children’s health, cancer awareness, and HIV/AIDS. They are community organizers, achieving better sanitation and neighborhood services such as recreation programs for children. They get their neighbors’ attention with street theater, wall murals, marketplace displays, and

demonstrations. They get their government’s attention through their persistence and temerity.

Mercedes believes that her most important work is with the children of their neighborhoods. “Children can still be saved,” she said, and this belief fuels her work in drug prevention, child immunizations, and alerting parents to preventable childhood diseases. She mothers the children of her poblaciones by boldly proclaiming that they have the right to a healthy and hopeful future.

The transcendence of motherhood

**Zarephath, Phoenicia.** A widow hosts the traveling prophet Elijah and then grieves the death of her only son. She chastises Elijah, the man of God, for allowing this tragedy to occur. Elijah, in response, cries out three times “O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again” (1 Kings 17:21b). And God listens.

This urge to mother—to nurture and protect—transcends gender; we all can serve as protectors and advocates for children nearby and around the world.

My early days of motherhood have been eventful; I’ve joined Calla in midnight sobs when the world overwhelms us both. And I’ve joined her in joyful laughter when she discovers tummy kisses or her wiggling toes. Babies around the world find calm in their mother’s voice

humming a familiar lullaby. Infant squeals of delight can be understood in any language. A child’s cry is a universal alert, cutting through the noise of our busy world.

By God’s grace and spirit we, too, hear the cries of parents and children living in poverty around the world and feel compelled to respond. The compassionate and comprehensive work of our World Hunger partners saves children from disease, poverty, and hunger. Our generous gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal support this life-saving work, offering the gift of hope to children and their families.

Blessed are the mothers, fathers, and caring neighbors who love the children of the world. 🌿

**Kathryn Sime** is director of the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal.

## Donate

You can donate to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal through the Women of the ELCA. Make your check out to “Women of the ELCA” and note “ELCA World Hunger Appeal” on the memo line of the check. Send your check to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL 60694.

Bookmark the ELCA World Hunger Web site: [www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger)



# Come to the Waters: A One-Day Retreat

by Audrey Novak Riley



Many Bible study groups love to gather monthly with *Lutheran Woman Today's* three-session summer Bible study, but for others, vacations and travel plans make it hard to get together. What to do?

Gather for a one-day retreat with the *LWT* summer Bible study, "Come to the Waters" by the Rev. Karen Bockelman.

**Who:** Invite all the women in your congregation, and women from other congregations in town, too. This study of the Scripture and the sacrament is also the Bible study of the 2008 Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA. The author is leading it herself at those meetings, July 8–10 and 10–13. Enjoying this study together at home will unite

you with the delegates at the Convention (including those from your own synodical women's organization) and the participants at the Gathering.

**Where:** Choose a scenic spot—perhaps the back yard of a first-class gardener! Or maybe someone's condo has a nice clubhouse with a patio. Be creative; think of a place that'll let you all enjoy not only the riches of Scripture and the companionship of the group, but also the beauty of summer.

**When:** Any time after the July/August issue arrives in about the middle of June—you might consider scheduling your retreat to coincide with the Triennial Gathering. Remind everyone to bring their copies of both the June and July/August issues to the retreat, or download all three sessions for free from the *LWT* Web site ([www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org)) and make copies for everyone—plus a few extras. The leader guide is included, so people don't need to bring anything else but their Bibles.

**How:** Share the work among several women. Ask someone different to lead each of the three sessions (it's easy; the leader guide appears in the magazine with each



ession). Ask a few other people to arrange healthful and delicious refreshments, and ask some others to decorate the area with fresh summer flowers and greenery. The study's about baptism, so think wet.

Start the morning with a light breakfast: coffee, bagels or croissants, and fruit (yum, fresh summer fruit). About 9:30, gather the group for the first session, "Water, Water Everywhere" in the June issue. That'll take about an hour, and then it's time for a break.

Stretch your legs, go look at the garden, stroll around the patio, have another strawberry or two. Then call the group back together and

enjoy the second session, "A Matter of Death and Life" in the July/August issue. When you've finished that, it's time for lunch.

After a healthful lunch, call the group back together to enjoy the third session, "Living Water, Walking Wet." When the group has completed that, it's time for a closing devotion. Remember the delegates and participants at the Triennial Convention and Gathering in your prayers together.

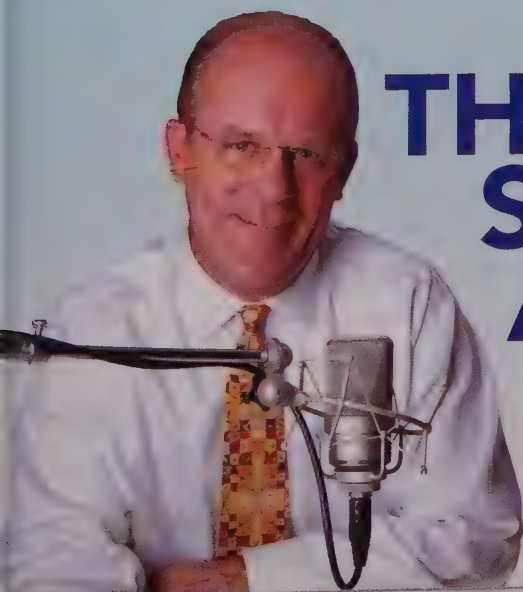
Welcome people to linger for another stroll in the garden and a little more conversation before picking up and heading for home. Tell people about the nine-month *LWT* Bible study that starts in

September—"The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther." Authors Gwen Sayler and Ann Fritschel invite us to see God at work behind the scenes in this study, working through the most unlikely people in the most unlikely places.

And as you wave goodbye until the next time, bask in the joy of sharing friendship, hospitality, and God's word together in the beauty of a summer day. 🌿

**Audrey Novak Riley** is associate editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.

Summer Bible studies "Act Boldly for Health," "Act Boldly for Mission," and "Come to the Waters" are available for download at [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org).



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## BIBLE STUDY

BLESSED TO FOLLOW: THE BEATITUDES  
AS A COMPASS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

### SESSION 9

# Blessings in the Midst of Suffering

by Martha E. Stortz

See a video clip of author Martha E. Stortz  
introducing Session 9 of this Bible study at  
[www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org).

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## Theme Verses

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12)

## Opening

Hymn "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 656; *Lutheran Book of Worship* 370

## Prayer

Gracious God,  
you became one of us  
to experience the full range of humanity,  
its deep joys and its wrenching sorrows.  
Help us accompany each other,  
as you have accompanied us.  
In the name of Jesus, our Companion, we pray.  
Amen.

## Introduction

God became one of us in order to experience everything we experience, even suffering and persecution. In this final Beatitude, we meet this crucified God at the center of all that we most love and all that we most fear. The psalmist writes of God's bounty even in the midst of enemy attack, and the apostle Paul writes of endurance in the midst of persecution. Both offer insight into the God who suffers with us.

## The Mystery of God's Bounty

"How could God let something like this happen?" I have no answer. My neighbor lost her husband at the age of 65. They were poised for a golden retirement, with grandchildren to spoil and trips to take together. Illness and death erased all that.



Her husband and my own were diagnosed with cancer within months of each other. Throughout their illnesses we shared doctors and treatments, home remedies and information on clinical trials around the country. The four of us would go out to dinner together, booking a booth so that whoever had the more recent surgery could hide his scars. Treatments worked for her husband that didn't work for mine and vice versa. We knew eventually nothing would work. Still, we had each other, and we grew closer through it all.

Now we two women eat alone together. I'll cook or she'll cook. Neither of us is ready for the booth at the restaurant. Nor is the restaurant crowd ready for our tears and our dark humor. Again and again she asks: "How could God let something like this happen?" I have no answer, so I just listen.

But a line from Psalm 27 keeps running through my head: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (v. 13). I have seen that goodness. Friends, family, and neighbors revealed it. Their unfailing kindness delivered the bounty of the Lord to my doorstep. That's the only response I can make.

Still the question keeps coming up: "How could God let something like this happen?" Maybe my attempt at an answer doesn't make sense; maybe it just doesn't make sense yet. In the meantime, the only thing to do is to be together in our sorrow, as God has been with us.

1. *Has someone you know (maybe it was you) ever asked God: "How could you let something like this happen?" What were the circumstances? Did that person receive a response? Was it the response she expected?*

## READ PSALM 27.

My father was a great whistler. He could do hymns, show tunes, anything. My sister and I wanted to whis-

tle like that too. In time, we could do two-part, then three-part harmony on a lot of those fine old Lutheran hymns we sang in the junior choir—at least until we all cracked up with the giggles.

The family went camping one weekend, and Dad led us to the bathrooms before lights out. The night was dark and the way was long. My sister and I convinced ourselves that the forest was full of bears. Nothing Dad said could persuade us otherwise, so he gave up and started whistling. We couldn't resist joining in, shakily at first, then with more and more confidence. Before long our fear of bears vanished.

Whistling in the dark is clearly the background music for Psalm 27. Despite the comfort of verse 13: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living," there's not much evidence of it in the rest of the psalm. Enemies abound; threats accumulate; and the psalmist longs for a safe haven. When the psalmist says, "I will sing and make melody to the LORD," I know he's in a darkness that threatens to swallow all sound.

The psalm whistles in the dark, and its song comforts us as we face our own dark nights and gloomy days.

2. *Can you recall a time when you (or someone you know) entered dark days? Did you believe you would ever see your way to find the goodness of the Lord? Maybe someone is still in the dark and hasn't whistled herself out of it yet. How would that feel?*
3. *Have you found "the goodness of the LORD" in the land of suffering? If so, where? How? In whom?*

## The Persecuted Paul

### READ ACTS 9:1–9.

The apostle Paul faced an unwelcome darkness. As Saul, he persecuted Christians. As Saul, he authorized the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, guarding the coats of the angry mob. The author



of Luke-Acts reports tersely: "And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church of Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). Then a blinding vision knocked Saul off his horse, and Jesus asked him: "Why do you persecute me?" But Saul could not speak; he could not even see.

Blind, helpless, and left alone, Saul had plenty of time to ponder the stunning reversal that left the persecutor among the persecuted. In those dark hours, he gave himself over to prayer. As a good Pharisee, he probably had all the psalms written on his heart. Perhaps he even prayed this psalm. Maybe he hoped wildly to see "the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living," but I imagine he would have settled for seeing anything again.

**4. Put yourself in Saul's sandals: What are some of the thoughts that must have been going through his mind as he sat in darkness?**

When the scales fall from his eyes, does Saul then see the goodness of the Lord? He sees the face of Ananias, the disciple who restored his sight. Three days before, Saul would have been pleased to kill the man who now heals him. The former persecutor of the disciples of Jesus joins the disciples. When word of Saul's conversion leaks out, the disciples smuggle Saul out of harm's way. Saul becomes Paul, persecutor turned preacher of the Risen Christ. It is the most stunning reversal of all.

Later in his ministry Paul makes his story into a song, chronicling all the incredible reversals that make up the journey of discipleship. He sings it to the community of Corinth, a cosmopolitan city full of pagan customs, charismatic prophets, and sages of all stripes. Paul deflates their smugness with irony. Imagine music in his words:

"For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death,

because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals.

We are fools for the sake of Christ,  
but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak,  
but you are strong.

You are held in honor,  
but we in disrepute.

To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty,  
we are beaten and thirsty,  
we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless,  
and we grow weary from the work of our own hands.

When reviled,  
we bless;  
when persecuted,  
we endure;  
when slandered,  
we speak kindly.

We have become like the rubbish of the world,  
the dregs of all things,  
to this very day." (1 Corinthians 4:9–13)

Then he chides the proud Corinthians: "I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. . . . For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness" (1 Corinthians 4:14, 20–21).

Paul looked for and found the goodness of the Lord in the midst of persecution. Only a crucified God can help.

- 5. Paul's song describes the world according to God. Does it sound inviting? Why or why not? If your congregation had a theme song, would it be this one? If not, how would its song go?**
- 6. Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the persecuted. This is a stunning reversal. Have you seen or experienced such a reversal in your own life?**

## The One blessing becomes the One blessed

Begin and end each day with beauty,” urges a friend. She keeps a stack of art books by her bedside. Beauty invites us each to rest in the goodness of the Lord. The truth, though, is that suffering and persecution dull the senses. When the world takes on the color of terror, beauty is the last thing we look for. That’s why God sent Goodness to our doorstep. It came in the person of Jesus.

The God born in Bethlehem came to share the full range of human experience—especially, it seems, the experience of those who suffer and those who are persecuted. Jesus spent much of his time with people living with suffering or persecution:

- He healed lepers, and leprosy was an ugly, disfiguring disease (see Luke 17:11–19). Risking not only ritual impurity but also the disease itself, Jesus touched the lepers (see Mark 1:40–45; Matthew 8:1–4; Luke 5:12–16).
- Nor did demonic possession frighten Jesus. Rather, he frightened the demons. They knew without doubt that the goodness of the Lord had appeared in their midst and protested fiercely: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God,” one blurted before fleeing (Mark 1:23–28). The demons knew exactly what they were up against: the goodness of the Lord.
- Blood could not stain the goodness of the Lord. Despite the laws that set apart people with a flow of blood as impure, Jesus allowed himself to be touched by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Mark 5:25–34). He blessed her, claimed her as a child of God, and sent her forth into a peace she had not known for years.
- Even death did not deter him. Jesus brought God’s goodness not just to the grave, but into and even through the grave. He touched the dead body of Jairus’ daughter, bringing her back to life (Mark

5:22–24, 35–43). At the sound of Jesus’ voice, Lazarus emerged from his tomb (John 11:38–44).

Jesus not only brought the goodness of the Lord into the land of suffering and persecution; he took all this evil upon himself, leaving us in return only blessing. Martin Luther called this “the happy exchange.” Jesus promises us this at the end of his public ministry in Matthew’s Gospel (25:31–46).

### READ MATTHEW 25:31–46.

Scholars call this last sermon the Great Judgment. Some people read the sermon from a viewpoint or hermeneutics of narcissism, as if the Bible were all about *us*. In this way of reading, the Great Judge separates the sheep from the goats and sends the sheep off into eternal life and the goats into eternal punishment. We worry about whether we belong among the sheep or the goats. It’s all about us.

But listen to his last sermon from another angle, a viewpoint or hermeneutics of goodness, for the Bible is full of the goodness of the Lord. In this way of reading, Jesus is making a promise, not a judgment. He shows the astonished herd of sheep and goats that he has been with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Not only has he been with them, he has been one of them. He tells the sheep and goats again and again: “Even as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.” Jesus takes on our suffering, persecution, and death.

In this way of reading, Jesus’ last sermon is clearly the story of the Great Promise, the promise of Emmanuel: “I am with you.”

We who dwell here know that the land of the living is full of pain. We cling all the more fiercely to the promise of the God who absorbed the world’s pain on the cross and left us with the goodness of abundant life. The crucified God promises resurrection. (See “All God’s Children” on p. 22.)



7. *Have you ever recognized Jesus in your own suffering or the suffering of someone else? How did you recognize him?*

**The ones blessed become the ones blessing**

**READ MATTHEW 5:1–12.**

The Beatitudes portray a world turned upside-down. Conditions that the world judges cursed become occasions of blessing. The first four Beatitudes address victims of the world's ways; the second four, those who aid them. All of these people will be richly blessed.

Read the first eight Beatitudes, which bless in third-person plural (“they” and “those who”) the people who suffer and those who aid them. Listen to the cadence of blessing and the beauty of language. We’d all like to see a world like that.

With the ninth Beatitude, however, Jesus turns to direct address. He speaks to disciples using the word “you.” The blessings are for them; the promises tell their future. Remember the cartoon character Pogo, who said, “We have met the enemy and he is us”? Jesus’ first sermon is similar: “We have met the blessed, and they is us!”

Not only will Jesus absorb the world’s pain into his body, so will all who follow him. Like Jesus, disciples will become “the least of these,” as they suffer and aid those who suffer, as they are persecuted and aid those who are persecuted.

But here is the promise: Suffering and persecution will not be the last words. The first eight Beatitudes begin and end with the same promise: the kingdom of heaven. The final Beatitude, addressed directly to the disciples, spells this out: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” In God’s kingdom, the goodness of the Lord reigns fully, completely, and every tear will be wiped away. The goodness of the Lord will rule! And part of the way that goodness rules is through us, as those whom the Beatitude blesses become a blessing to others. (Read “Blessed to See” on p. 34.)

8. *Over the course of this Bible study, you have been invited to share stories and to listen to others’ stories. Have any of these stories helped you? Have they shown you something you could not have seen in any other way?*

**Practices: Works of Mercy,**

**Responses to Blessing**

If discipleship is about following Jesus, disciples need to know where to find him. We meet Jesus as we gather around word and sacrament; we meet him in those who suffer and face persecution. It’s worth noting that in both settings, Jesus’ body is broken. In the Lord’s Supper, it is broken for us, so that it can become our food. Through this meal we are knit together into one body. In suffering, that body is broken in the shattered bodies and spirits of those who are persecuted. In and through that brokenness, Jesus promises the goodness of God for the land of the living.

This final Beatitude suggests two practices of discipleship: the Lord’s Supper and the works of mercy outlined in Jesus’ last sermon. We have already discussed the Lord’s Supper as the faith practice of Session 7. This session examines the specific practices Jesus leaves with his disciples as he prepares to die.

**READ MATTHEW 25:31–46 AGAIN.**

Jesus’ first sermon is the Beatitudes, and his last sermon is the Great Promise. Jesus’ last words echo his first, only this time the one doing the blessing has become the one blessed. This time the disciples have done the blessing. They seem stunned by this, and they ask repeatedly, “When did we see you . . . ?” They have been swept all unaware into the kingdom of heaven. What did they do?

They simply followed Jesus.

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus needs to know where to look for him. Jesus’ last sermon gives disciples then and now directions. “If you want to find me,

"this is where to look," Jesus seems to be saying. Look for where people are suffering, where people are persecuted. If we want to find Jesus, that is where we are to look.

But discipleship is no spectator sport. The Beatitudes don't bless disciples just so we'll look good; they bless us to *do* good. When we do that good, we are not bearing our own goodness, but the goodness of the Lord. Through that goodness, broken for us in the Lord's Supper, we become what we eat. As Luther put it, we bear the face of Christ to our neighbor. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Jesus is specific about the blessing we are to be. Feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners. The directions we are provided are concise, direct, and urgent. (See "A Life Transformed" on p. 6.)

Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters call these actions (along with two others, sheltering the homeless and burying the dead) the seven corporal works of mercy. This language sometimes alarms Lutherans, because it seems to suggest "works righteousness," that is, it seems to suggest that we can earn our own blessing.

But remember, the disciples in question have already been blessed—blessed to be a blessing. The Beatitudes already gave disciples both blessing and promise. All we have to do is say yes! These actions are how we are to respond to the blessing we have already received. Through them we bring the goodness of the Lord into the land of the living.

### 9. *How do we follow Jesus? How do we find him?*

*What specific things might we do in our congregation? Consider this a mandate.*

**Hymn** "Go, My Children, with My Blessing," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 543; *With One Voice* 721

## Prayer

Holy Jesus,  
you have blessed us to be a blessing to others.  
Enable us to feed the hungry,  
give drink to the thirsty,  
welcome the stranger,  
clothe the naked,  
care for the sick,  
visit the imprisoned,  
shelter the homeless, and  
honor the dead and dying.  
Give us eyes to see your face  
in your sisters and brothers,  
Give us the heart to love them as you do.  
In the strong name of your Spirit we pray,  
Amen.

**Leader:** Finally, as we scatter to serve you,  
we bless each other with your peace.

**Leader:** The peace of the Lord be with you all.

**All:** And also with you!

**Leader:** Let us share with one another a sign of Christ's peace.

(After the peace is shared, continue with the dismissal)

**Leader:** Go in peace! Serve the Lord! 🌿

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## Looking ahead

This summer, join us in our three-session Bible study, "Come to the Waters," by the Rev. Karen Bockelman. This Bible study expands on the theme of the 2008 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City, Utah. We will explore the rich images and meanings of baptism and how that sacrament shapes our lives and vocations. "Come to the Waters" is an invitation to "walk wet"—to remember, affirm, and celebrate baptism throughout life.





# BLESSED TO SEE

*by David L. Miller*

CHRISTIANITY IS A WAY OF SEEING, A TRANSFORMATION OF VISION. BUT THIS CHANGE IN HOW WE SEE LIES BEYOND OUR OWN LIGHTS AND ABILITY. IT FLOWS FROM THE AWARENESS THAT WE ARE LOVED BY A LOVE THAT CANNOT BE NAMED OR MEASURED, A LOVE WHO IS INFINITE AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE, ETERNAL YET NOW, FAR BEYOND US YET AS CLOSE OUR BREATH. APART FROM THIS AWARENESS, MANY OF JESUS' WORDS MAKE NO SENSE. TAKE THE FINAL BLESSING IN JESUS' BEATITUDES. HIS WORDS ARE MADNESS TO OUR NORMAL WAYS OF SEEING.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:10-12).

Rejoice and be glad? Try offering that advice to a friend who is being denounced for taking an unpopular stand. Rejoicing is not our normal response to such pain. Public rejection is something we avoid, and when it comes we don't rejoice. We try to escape it or explain it away. Or we criticize and verbally strike back at those who are mean to us.

Giving thanks to God is not typically on the agenda when we suffer. Nor do we tend to experience a sense of blessing in such a state. Rejection, denunciation, and persecution do not qualify as a state of blessing in our normal way of seeing. Just the opposite.

In our society, we associate blessing with good health, sufficient wealth, personal safety, family unity, and contentment with our lot in life. Blessing is defined by that famous Norman Rockwell painting of a family gathered for Thanksgiving dinner around a table heaping with food. Blessing equals peaceful relations and freedom from want.

Or does it? Does our normal way of seeing blind us and keep

us from entering a world of beauty and joy we seldom see?

Yes. But entering this world requires a transformation of vision that comes only as you are enveloped by the Love that made the stars. Liberating sight grows as we know ourselves drenched by the Mercy who wears the face of Jesus. This awareness opens eyes to truest blessing and beauty. It ushers us into intimacy with the God who is ever Emmanuel, near, with, and in us.

#### The kingdom experience

This is just so many words until we root it in experiences near to us. And there are some. I will share two from my life.

I remember a hot day in late November. I sat in the dust of a road that was no more than a track worn in the grass, cutting across a remote landscape in southern Sudan. Several Sudanese companions sat with me along with one Englishman. And we ate a rare feast: some of the stringiest, greasiest chicken imaginable, the gift of a local bishop. But the two meager pieces swimming in an unknown red sauce on our tin plates were a fat feast compared with the hunger we witnessed everywhere we traveled in that troubled land.

At one point during our feast, I dropped a scrawny chicken leg in the dust. I unsuccessfully tried to shake off the dirt, then put it in my



mouth and chewed it, dust and all. The dust was good, very good.

Gratitude filled me. At that moment, I knew: I would rather be there, eating dirty chicken, than anywhere else on Earth. I felt connected, completely and utterly one with that Ground of Love that had moved each of us to this place on a mission of mercy to a hungry and dying multitude.

There was no separation between me and the mystery of the Love who is God. I was in God, and God was in me. We were inseparably one, and the love that fills Jesus flowed also from the core of my being. I tasted

A student and I sit in the office that is my home on typical workdays. She comes because she needs a friend, and there seems no place else to go. And she cries out her despair over years that have not taken her down smooth roads of success to the life she'd planned. She weeps, imagining herself undisciplined and slothful. No longer is she able to force herself to do work that something in her resists, something far deeper than she imagines.

And soon enough I gently laugh, not at her, but at the determined (but doomed) battle she has waged for decades against what her soul

A oneness fills the room as we are aware our lives are immersed in a bottomless sea of mercy. And the work she could be doing instead of sitting with me—to say nothing of the meeting I am missing to sit with her—mean nothing compared with the wordless knowledge we share of the One who is Emmanuel.

### Nothing else compares

This awareness of God's kingdom, God's loving rule enveloping us, changes everything. It evaporates fear. It transforms tears of sorrow into knowing laughter. It reveals that all is well, and all will be well, regardless of our circumstances. For we are encompassed in a determined love that will not let us go.

Such awareness transforms our vision that we witness and know blessedness where normal sight sees only suffering.

Christians see differently because they have tasted the rule of God's love. They know that nothing compares with the beauty and joy of knowing Emmanuel, God's intimate nearness, even if that means others misunderstand, reject, and denounce.

And they will, even in the church. I recently received a letter from a pastoral intern. She described the criticism that came to her from a pastor and a parishioner for teaching the ways she meditates on Scripture to stay in close relationship with God. "You do some strange

## CHRISTIANS SEE DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE TASTED THE RULE OF GOD'S LOVE.

that unity with divine love that is the fulfillment of God's kingdom. This was true blessedness, and I knew it.

But there are other moments less removed from the rooms and offices where we do our daily living. There are moments when the kingdom of God paints our experience with the rich colors of eternity, and we know blessedness.

requires of her, against what the creative Spirit of God planted deep in her heart. Something is there that can be denied no longer, and we both know it.

With laughter comes love and communion, not just with each other but with the Loving Mystery who leads us in ways and directions that we seldom recognize and often resist.

ings,” she was warned. “You need to be careful of being too out there, woo woo-woo.”

But in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus invites us way out there.

Jesus urges his disciples to an everabundant righteousness, far beyond what others think reasonable (Matthew 5:17–20). We are to exhibit the same righteousness as Jesus:

- Be merciful as God is merciful;
- Forgive as lavishly as God forgives you;
- Love your enemies and pray for them;
- Seek reconciliation not retaliation;
- Make peace with your accuser;
- Don’t judge others’ faults, for you have your own;
- Be meek, not seeking to exercise your rights over others;
- Be pure of heart, seeking God’s will more than your own;
- Avoid lust and all that pulls you from God’s will for your life;
- Serve God more than money, for you can’t have two masters;
- Pray simply with a heart of trust;
- Release worry, trusting that God’s love is guiding and will prevail;
- Do not run, but surrender to the suffering that comes for the sake of God’s righteousness and justice.

Do all this, Jesus says. And why? Because nothing matters more than participating in God’s kingdom. God’s rule is the supreme blessing of life, the reality for which we are

made. It is the end to which the Spirit draws us that we may know and rest in the goodness of God. Even now we may be blessed with the divine loving nearness and taste the kingdom’s completion.

#### Streams of living water

Awareness and experiences of oneness with God’s loving rule transform both our vision and action. We come to recognize that two ages, two times, overlap in our lives. The struggle and fear of the present age overlaps with the time of healing and love of God’s holy rule. This happens in every moment of our breathing and every sphere of our existence.

In the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of God’s Spirit, the dawn of God’s everlasting morning breaks into our world. The rose-glow light of eternity illumines our present, here and now, amid a world worn and cold with sin and sorrow, death and rage.

Two times overlap and conflict for us and in us. The old age may be clearer than God’s new time. But those with eyes to see, ears to hear, and faith to trust know that the new age has come. God’s new time is present and clear in our awareness of that enveloping Love who will not let us go.

Living in two overlapping ages, we have a choice, one we make again and again. Shall we see and

live with a mind of fear or a mind of faith?

If the old age of fear defines us, we will see threat nearly everywhere we look. The highest goal of personal and national life will be protecting ourselves and those nearest to us. Our small souls will shrivel, and we will miss the blessedness of God’s loving rule.

But the Spirit invites us to surrender our trust to the Infinite Love revealed in every experience of blessed unity—and most certainly in the face of Jesus. Trusting the new age, we seek the righteousness of Jesus, even if it means hardship.

And we find blessedness in surprising ways and places. Seeing with a mind of faith, our souls soar. Our hearts grow expansive and generous as the heart of Jesus, who embraces all that we are with that divine love for which no name will do.

Basking in such love, our souls become fountains of God’s Spirit, flowing with streams of living water (John 7:38). And we know the blessedness that no suffering can steal, no sadness can deny, no grief can extinguish, and no death can destroy. 🌿

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HEALTH WISE

## Overcoming Arthritis

by Molly M. Ginty

### For Margie Fusco, the

small stuff was the most maddening. "Arthritis made my fingers so stiff that I couldn't pick a penny up off the floor," says Fusco, a 58-year-old magazine editor in Worthington, Ohio. "I couldn't open a jar, peel a potato, fasten a necklace, or even work a zipper."

After 30 years of arthritis, Fusco's hands were curled and incapacitated—until she had surgery to correct "trigger finger," the arthritic condition that had immobilized her joints.

"Though I may never have perfect movement or motion, surgery has made my life much easier," says Fusco, who can now type and use utensils with ease.

Fusco's story proves that there is hope for the 46 million Americans—most of them women—whose joints are affected by arthritis.

During May, National Arthritis Month, health advocates are working to warn women about this potentially debilitating disease.

"That chronic ache in your knee, stab of pain when you move your shoulder, or stiffness in your hands or feet could be tell-tale signs that you're developing arthritis," says Dr. John H. Klippel, M.D., president of the Atlanta-based Arthritis Foundation.

Women are twice as likely as men to have arthritis, and doubly likely to suffer disability as a result. More than 20 percent of women are afflicted at some point in their lives, which is why women of all ages need to take steps to protect their joints.

Though there are more than 100 forms of arthritis, the two main types that women need to be aware of are osteoarthritis (degenerative, site-specific cartilage breakdown) and rheumatoid arthritis (a systemic autoimmune condition involving inflammation of joint membranes).

Osteoarthritis, which afflicts 21 million Americans, occurs when the cartilage that cushions the ends of bones wears down. Usually striking one joint at a time and growing worse with age, it most commonly affects the hands, hips, knees, and spine and causes pain, tenderness, stiffness, swelling, and loss of flexibility.

Rheumatoid arthritis, which affects 2.1 million Americans, strikes when the white blood cells that normally fight infection attack the synovial membranes that line the joints. The synovium thickens, and its inflamed cells release enzymes that digest the joint's bone tissue and cartilage. The results are swelling, inflammation, stiffness, and pain.

From medication to meditation to special ways of moving, there are simple steps you can take to fight these forms of arthritis before they even start. Every step you take to stop arthritis will help health advocates win a larger battle against this devastating disease.

The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts that by the year 2030, 67 million American adults will suffer from arthritis—a 50 percent increase from today's prevalence.

Arthritis currently costs the U.S. economy \$128 billion per year—and

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This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for more information.

## GET MOVING

Gentle exercises such as biking, swimming, and water aerobics can strengthen the muscles around the joints without straining them. Walking just 30 minutes a day—or for 10 minutes three times a day—is enough to ease joint pain and improve mobility.

## STAY STABLE

To protect your joints, spread their workload evenly, pushing or pulling with both arms instead of one. Favor your strongest muscles and largest joints, lifting boxes with bent legs and a straight back instead of using your arms. Sit and stand tall, as good posture keeps your weight distribution—and the stress on your joints—evenly balanced.

## SLIM DOWN

According to the Arthritis Foundation, losing 10 pounds if you're overweight can relieve 40 pounds of pressure on the knees, and losing 15 pounds can cut knee pain in half.

## BALANCE EFFORT AND EASE

During strenuous activities, wear joint-protecting braces and supports. If one of your joints starts hurting, rest it for 12 to 24 hours. As it recovers, go easy when working it and remember to take 10-minute breaks every hour.

## GO OVER THE COUNTER

If you experience joint pain, treat it with over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol), analgesic creams, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as Advil or Motrin), if your doctor says you can.

## TAKE YOUR MEDS

If you are diagnosed with arthritis, set regular times to take your prescription medications, which may include analgesics for osteoarthritis, immunosuppressants and anti-inflammatory drugs for rheumatoid arthritis, and painkillers for both conditions.

## EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES

Last year, a University of Maryland study found that regular meditation practice can reduce arthritis patients' inflammation by 17 percent—and their psychological suffering by 35 percent. Other complementary treatments may include tai chi and yoga, acupuncture, and the dietary supplements chondroitin and glucosamine. Before spending much money on alternative treatments, however, consult your doctor. Many so-called "arthritis cures" only benefit the seller's bank account.

## EAT RIGHT

Too much saturated fat may worsen joint inflammation, but vitamin C and folic acid (found in oranges and other citrus fruits) can slow the progression of arthritis.

## CONSIDER SURGERY

If other remedies fail, talk to your doctor about surgery. For osteoarthritis, there is bone realignment, bone fusion, and debridement, in which loose pieces of bone and cartilage are removed from around the joint. For rheumatoid arthritis, there is tendon repair and joint lining removal. For both conditions, total joint replacement may be a choice.

could cost us billions more if we don't check its advance. "Progress in our fight against arthritis will require a much more serious investment in research," says Klippel. "We need to take action now to stop this disease from eroding both our bodies and our bank accounts." 🌸

**Molly M. Ginty** lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, and *Redbook*. Go to [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org) to read past Health Wise columns.





WE RECOMMEND

## Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

### Be refreshed. Be inspired. Be connected!

Come to the Seventh Triennial Women of the ELCA Gathering July 10–13 at Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah. The “Come to the Waters” event will teach, inspire, and challenge you to a greater understanding of our faith and what it means to live it out.

Speakers include Pastor Heidi Neumark, author of *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx*, and Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, an award-winning author and spiritual leader for more than 30 years.

The Rev. Marysol Diaz, pastor of St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, and an adjunct faculty member of the Evangelical Seminary in Puerto Rico, will preach at the Thankoffering service.

Workshops will explore such topics as how Lutherans read the Bible, what discipleship means, and how to revitalize and reinvigorate your women’s group.

The convention business sessions will be held July 8–10 for registered delegates and any Women of the ELCA participant who wishes to attend and observe. For more information, visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2737. Registration for the event is \$325.

### Augsburg Fortress offers Living Well series

For those who live with chronic illness or disability, the book *Being Well When We’re Ill* by Marva J. Dawn might help. *Being Well When We’re Ill: Wholeness and Hope in Spite of Infirmary* is a part of Augsburg Fortress’ Living Well series. Dawn, a theologian and

educator with Christians Equipped for Ministry of Vancouver, Washington, has an insider’s view of the many spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, and physical difficulties encountered by people with chronic illness and disabilities.

Each chapter of *Being Well When We’re Ill* focuses on such struggles as worry, guilt, loss of meaning, or the loss of trust that God is present and loving. Dawn explores loneliness, physical pain, depression, ingratitude, side effects, and more. She includes discussions of biblical texts that help lament losses and bring wholeness. Order the book from Augsburg Fortress by calling 800-328-4648 or visiting [www.augsburgbooks.com](http://www.augsburgbooks.com).

### Travel faithfully this summer

Join travel author and public television host Rick Steves in an exclusive five-part journey through church history and global mission. In the video “Faithful Travel,” Steves lays out his personal philosophy—and theology—of traveling faithfully. Steves asks fellow travelers to consider the impact of their travel on the people they meet, to delve deeply into the wonders of God’s created world, and to think carefully about how their travel helps (or hinders) matters of peace and justice.

Steves reveals his sense of personal mission and poses some difficult questions about how travel changes lives forever. The program is available on DVD for \$39.95 by visiting [www.elca.org/mosaic/faithfultravel](http://www.elca.org/mosaic/faithfultravel) or calling 800-638-3522 ext. 6009. The video can also be viewed on the Web site.

Marva J. Dawn



Being Well  
When We’re Ill

Wholeness and Hope  
in Spite of Infirmary



GRACE NOTES

## I Am Blessed

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



**I started the day hopeful,** as I do most days. I put together a chicken dish in the crock pot, looking forward to an easy dinner. Then I ran some errands, and I was feeling good about all that I was accomplishing. I was on a roll.

I headed home to mounds of laundry and set to work. The first load in the dryer seemed to take forever. The dryer had been running for at least 45 minutes, and the clothes were still wet. I groaned to myself as I surveyed the many loads of waiting laundry.

Then it struck me—I wasn't smelling dinner. Sure enough, our loyal crock pot wasn't working. The chicken was stone cold. Great, now I'm going to have to come up with another dinner, I thought. Later, after we had (a revised) dinner, I was ready to leave for my circle's Bible study when my grandson spit up . . . on both my sweater and pants. Not having anything else clean—remember the dryer problem?—I had to spot-clean as best I could.

To be honest, I was grumbling when I got behind the wheel. Traffic was snarled, as always when it rains around here. The weather was miserable, and my attitude was a match. I was off to talk about blessings, and I wasn't feeling particularly blessed. As I drove along, however, the Holy Spirit broke in and my heart softened.

My dryer might be broken, but I had indoor plumbing, clean water, and an automatic washer. Yes, I am blessed.

The chicken dish was lost, but there were other foods in my kitchen and I

was able to put together a nutritious meal. None of us would go to bed hungry that night. Yes, I am blessed.

So my grandson had spit up on me just as I was leaving the house. My husband and I have our daughter and grandson living with us, and I get to see the baby grow and our daughter mature as a mother. The baby's giggles alone are a blessing. Yes, I am blessed.

It was rainy and cold. Where I live, we're not suffering from a drought like other parts of the country or other places around the globe. And our roof doesn't leak; my family is warm and dry. Yes, I am blessed.

If you are like me, your understanding of the Beatitudes has expanded in the last nine months of Bible study. Your heart and mind are likely more receptive to seeing the manifold blessings in your life and the lives of those you hold dear.

As the current study comes to a close, it is appropriate for us to take stock, both individually and corporately, of the blessings that God has heaped upon us. Would you take time to do that in your next congregational unit or circle meeting? As you come together for a synodical convention or retreat, would you pause to do that? We have a whole evening at the upcoming Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City where we will celebrate our blessings as we commemorate our organization.

May we always be a blessing to each other and to all we meet. 🌿

**Linda Post Bushkofsky** is executive director of Women of the ELCA.





AMEN!

## Looking Good

by Catherine Malotky

### Let's just own up to it.

We all want to be in good with God. In the old days, we took a bath every Saturday night—we washed away the dirt and smells of the week past and prepared to be in God's presence. If someone failed to spruce up and still dared to come to church, we wondered among ourselves about disrespect and not following the rules and maintaining standards.

Standards for church dress have changed over the years. In some places, casual is the norm. We still have unwritten rules to follow. We expect ourselves to be on our best behavior. We expect ourselves and our children to sit quietly, to listen to the sermon, to sing, to smile at everyone.

Ironically, all this looking good stuff is not what you demand, is it God? That's us, trying to make a good impression. But you know us inside and out.

So what's all the fussing about? If we have this gift of welcome from the God of the whole universe, what does that mean for our lives? Maybe it means we can consider ourselves partners in the task of making the world a better place for all of God's creatures, human and otherwise. Maybe it means we don't need to focus any energy on making impressions—maybe it's about getting down to the redemption business. Not that we do the redeeming. That's God's job. But we are God's hands, and there is plenty to do.

Jesus infuriated the good religious folks of his day because he hung around with tax collectors and prostitutes. Talk

about lax standards! And he welcomed them, ate with them, and loved them. It was these people, the people on the outskirts of society, the ones left out by economics or behavior or lousy luck (does anyone ask to get leprosy or to be born of slaves?) or gender or race or . . . these were the folks Jesus was with.

What does that tell us about you, God, if Jesus is the clearest thing about you that we can see? What does that tell us about people on the margins and all our concerns about standards? Maybe the very things we do to spruce ourselves up on your behalf are the opposite of what you'd have us be up to. Rather than setting ourselves apart as especially good people, maybe you call us to be people who do good.

If we can redirect our perspectives, God, will you be around when we start getting grief from our friends and our culture, which is all about winning? What if we decide, in faith, that the rules are different? What if we come to believe that you are most present on the margins, and we start living there too? Will you still be there for us, God? What will it cost us?

Jesus, invite us to the margins to be with you and those you love. Give us courage to release our need to keep score, to measure up, and help us turn instead toward trust in your providing. Your love is enough, O God. Amen. 🌸

**The Rev. Catherine Malotky** serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



# Warm Hearts, Warm Heads



Phyllis Harper, a member of Martha Circle at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chandler, Arizona, enjoys warming the hearts—and heads—of American soldiers. When her grandson began serving in Iraq, she fashioned a few knit caps to send to him and his closest friends. The caps were so well received that she made more. So far, she's sent about 1,000 hats to service members in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Using a loom, she makes the caps with yarn that is mostly donated by neighbors, friends, and fellow church members. Because Phyllis attaches her name in the caps, she gets back some of the warmth she sends over—in the form of appreciative notes of thanks from the soldiers.

*Submitted by Chris Roen, Martha Circle*

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LWT Editorial Office

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8765 W. Higgins Rd.

Chicago, IL 60631-4189

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[lwt@elca.org](mailto:lwt@elca.org) [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org)

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